

The Open Enrollment period for Medicare coverage begins today, said Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (OH-9), and runs through December 31.

“Open Enrollment serves as an annual ‘coverage checkup,’ and everyone with Medicare should take advantage of this opportunity,” Congresswoman Kaptur said. “People with Medicare might find better coverage or additional savings compared to current plans. If they have any questions, they should call our office.”

During the Open Enrollment period, current or newly eligible Medicare beneficiaries, including people with Original Medicare, can review current health and prescription drug coverage; compare health and drug plan options available in their area; and, choose the coverage that best meets their needs.

She noted that the new health care reform law will provide additional benefits for Medicare beneficiaries, including:

- A 50 percent discount on brand-name drugs in the coverage gap, the so-called donut hole;
- Wellness checkups;
- No co-payments for preventive care, a benefit that most Medicare Advantage plans also offer.

Among the resources available to explore these options:

- Internet: The web site, www.medicare.gov, which offers a personalized comparison of costs and coverage of the plans available in their area through the Medicare Plan Finder and Medicare Options Compare tools.

- Telephone: Call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) for around-the-clock assistance. TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048. Multilingual information and counseling is available.

- Printed material: the 2011 Medicare & You handbook is available by calling Congresswoman Kaptur's office or by visiting www.medicare.gov.

- Personal assistance: one-on-one counseling from the local State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). Local SHIP contact information can be obtained by calling 1-800-MEDICARE.

Under Medicare's Limited Income Newly Eligible Transition (NET) program, Medicare beneficiaries who cannot meet the costs of prescription drugs might be eligible for additional resources. Based on eligibility for "extra help," some people Medicare will pay no more than \$2.50 for each generic drug and no more than \$6.30 for each name brand drug.

The NET program can also help pay for premiums and other out-of-pocket costs. There is no cost to apply for this extra help. Medicare beneficiaries, family members, trusted counselors or caregivers can apply online at www.socialsecurity.gov/prescriptionhelp or call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY users should call 1-800-325-0778) to find out more.

Congresswoman Kaptur said the new health care law also provides better tools to help fight waste, fraud and abuse to help protect Medicare. Beneficiaries should not give personal information to anyone arriving to their home uninvited or making unsolicited phone calls selling Medicare-related products or services. Beneficiaries who believe they are a victim of fraud or identity theft should contact 1-800-MEDICARE or visit www.stopmedicarefraud.gov.

More information is available at www.healthcare.gov.

